

AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS:

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

Listing of Claims:

Claims 1-16. (cancelled)

17. (currently amended) A telescopic shaft according to Claim ~~14~~34, wherein:

said preloading portion comprises a first axial groove provided on an outer peripheral surface of said male shaft and a second axial groove provided on an inner peripheral surface of said female shaft ~~to oppose~~opposed to said first axial groove; and

said rolling member and said elastic member are provided between said first and second axial grooves.

18. (currently amended) A telescopic shaft according to Claim ~~14~~34, wherein:

a plurality of said preloading portions are provided between said male shaft and said female shaft; and

a plurality of said torque transmitting portions are provided respectively between adjacent preloading portions.

19. (previously presented) A telescopic shaft according to Claim 18, wherein said preloading portions are provided at intervals of 120° in a circumferential direction and said torque transmitting portions are respectively provided between said preloading portions.

20. (previously presented) A telescopic shaft according to Claim 19, wherein said torque transmitting portions are provided at respective central portions in the circumferential direction between said preloading portions.

21. (currently amended) A telescopic shaft according to Claim ~~14~~34, wherein said at least one rolling member comprises a spherical member.

22. (currently amended) A telescopic shaft according to Claim ~~14~~34, wherein said elastic member comprises a leaf spring.

23. (currently amended) A telescopic shaft according to Claim ~~14~~34, wherein a solid lubricant film is formed on one of the outer peripheral portion of said male shaft and the inner peripheral portion of said female shaft.

24. (currently amended) A telescopic shaft according to ~~claim 14~~Claim 34, wherein said telescopic shaft is constructed for incorporation in a vehicle steering mechanism.

25-33. (cancelled)

34. (new) A telescopic shaft in which a male shaft and a female shaft are fitted to each other to be able to transmit torque therebetween and move relative to each other in an axial direction, comprising:

a torque transmitting portion provided in an outer peripheral portion of said male shaft and in an inner peripheral portion of said female shaft for transmitting torque, said torque transmitting portion comprising spline fitting portions or serration fitting portions formed on an outer peripheral surface of said male shaft and an inner peripheral surface of said female shaft, said spline fitting portion or serration fitting portion of said male shaft and said spline fitting portion or serration fitting portion of said female shaft being always in slidable contact with each other;

at least one rolling member provided between the outer peripheral portion of said male shaft and the inner

peripheral portion of said female shaft and rolling when said male shaft and said female shaft are relatively moved in the axial direction; and

a preloading portion which includes an elastic member provided adjacent to said rolling member for applying preload on said male shaft and said female shaft through said rolling member.